



From Self Discipline to Rituals

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Let's face it – change is not easy. Bringing about change means often stepping out of our comfort zone to an unknown place – whether it be eating right, reducing our need to check emails constantly or giving up negative habits.

The barrier that comes in the way of long term permanent change is often ourselves. “Do I have enough self discipline to bring about the change I desire” In this newsletter, I want to introduce an alternative approach to that need for “discipline”

Relying on self discipline has been shown to be poor contributor to long term change.

Think about your new year's resolutions. How many of you have fulfilled all of them? Typically very few – often because they rely on self discipline. Let's say you want to start exercising more. If you simply rely on your willpower alone to accomplish it, chances are that you'll do well for a short while, and then fall off the wagon.

Discipline takes a lot of energy; because we try to bend our will away from what might be most pleasurable in the moment and towards what may be useful in the long run.

Yet how many of you brush your teeth on a daily basis? Typically (Hopefully) all of you. As a ritual you did it and no self discipline was involved. Chances are you just do it automatically. Why? Because it has become a sub-conscious habit. It has become a *ritual*.

It may be a surprise to note that research has shown that those who were able to bring about long term lasting change which resulted in greater happiness and achievement of goals resulted not from relying on self discipline but rather those who introduced rituals into their lives.

We all have a limited amount of self discipline. What you have is what you got. While that is the bad news, the good news is you do not need that much more to be happier and more successful by switching your focus from self discipline to rituals.

Rituals are powerful because they help bring any behavior into a subconscious, automatic habit.

Authors Tony Schwartz and Jim Loehlt in their book *The Power of Full Engagement* state : *“Building rituals requires defining very precise behaviors and performing them at very specific times—motivated by deeply held values.”*

To be truly effective, our goals must be aligned with our values. It's not enough for someone else to say it's a good thing to do. We ourselves must deem the goal worthy of sustained action.

In our ever complex environment where our attention is being pulled in so many different directions, rituals can be one way of working towards our goals and grounding us to what is important in our lives.

If we look at professions that demand peak performance, such as surgical teams, pilots, athletes, musicians and others, what we can observe is that they all use positive ritual to build focus and maintain safety. They don't leave it to chance, conscious willpower, or discipline to come up with the right action.

How many rituals you develop or have is your choice – some people want structure while others want more flexibility. The point is that you have some rituals. You may need to undergo some trial and error in finding



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what works for you. Play with it.

Further, defining rituals is not about removing the creativity, spontaneity or productivity from the event. For example you may develop a ritual to spend time with your family or your team every week at a set time. What you do in that time does not have to be necessarily defined in advance; it's that you have made that time on a regular basis. Another example may be that you allocate a set time each week to work on your business or a key project. In doing so, you have created a space for being both productive and creative.

Research has shown that the most creative people are those who had defined rituals of focusing on their passions and had the freedom to create within those rituals

The key when introducing a new ritual is to persist with it for at least 30 days. It's not easy to develop a new ritual. This is where we require our element of self discipline and it is for this reason that we need to limit introducing one or two rituals at a time in order to set ourselves up for success. Introducing more is too taxing for our limited quota of self discipline. Hence the failure of most new year's resolutions – overload often leading to no action on any front. Once the ritual is in place, it requires some self discipline but very little. We have enough to sustain but not enough to introduce

The Three Elements of a Ritual: A clear ritual can include these three elements:

When - At what time are you going to do the activity?

Where - Where are you going to do it?

How - In what manner, in what order, and using what?

Examples of Rituals to Build

- Your daily workout schedule
- A daily walk
- Your learning or reading ritual
- Your time-management ritual around email free times or internet free time
- Time on the business
- Time with your partner or family
- Weekly team meetings

My challenge to you: *Write down at least two rituals that you would like to introduce into your life. Commit to regular times during which you will carry out these rituals.*

"Incremental change is better than ambitious failure.... Success feeds on itself." Loehr and Schwartz